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"This is a Theatre of Assault": Amiri Baraka's Dutchman and a Civil Rights Othello

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On the night of Saturday, July 19, 1964, violence erupted in Harlem in reaction to the shooting of 15-year-old black teenager James Powell by a white, off-duty New York City police officer. What began as a peaceful protest of the incident rapidly escalated into large-scale civil unrest. Earl Coldwell, at the time a young reporter sent to the city to cover the story for the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, remembers:

> The rioting in Harlem came in furious bursts. Rocks and bottles sailed from tenement roofs. Molotov cocktails exploded on streets littered with broken glass. Cops fired salvo after salvo into smoky, pitch-black skies. Police cruisers, sirens wailing, roared in pursuit of hit-and-run looters.
>
> Crowds lined the streets, sometimes as many as a thousand people, all of them black and screaming, jeering, ducking, dodging and – when turned on by riot-weary cops – scrambling and running.

The following day, the *New York Times* reported that "Thousands of rioting Negroes raced through the center of Harlem last night and early today, shouting at policemen and white people, pulling fire alarms, breaking windows and looting stores" (Montgomery 1). The upheaval would continue on a smaller scale for the next two nights, resulting in hundreds of injuries and arrests and at least one death.

Although riots had occurred in the district on at least two previous occasions in the twentieth century, once in 1935 and again in 1943, the coverage of the 1964 incident by the *Times* was markedly washed in the anxieties of what would come to be known as the civil rights

era. James W. Silver, in an article for *The New York Times Magazine* on the legacy of racism in Mississippi, noted an air of reluctant inevitability regarding racial desegregation. "He knows," writes Silver of the southern segregationist, "that the time is fast running out when the country will longer tolerate this" (8). Headlines from the paper on July 20, the next day, further underscore the degree to which the issue of race was a part of Manhattan's collective consciousness during that summer; "Johnson Decries Terrorist Foes of Negro Rights" (1), "Colorado Democrats Urge Segregated-Delegation Ban" (52), and "Race Tranquility Won in Savannah" (51) were some of many racially themed stories published alongside accounts of the riots.

In addition to the sheer number and frequency of news stories explicitly concerned with race in July of 1964, of greater significance was the increasing rhetorical stridency, even militancy, on the part of those agitating for African American civil rights. During a speech in reaction to the riots delivered to a crowd of over 500 people, Jesse Gray, the leader of the Harlem rent strike, called for "'100 skilled black revolutionaries who are ready to die' to correct what he called 'the police brutality situation in Harlem'" (Griffin 16).[1] Gray's statement was greeted with enthusiastic applause. Chris Sprowal, leader of the civil rights organization CORE, proclaimed "It is time to let 'the man' . . . know that if he does something to us we are going to do something back" (Apple 16). Charles Sanders, also of CORE, went further in his outrage, claiming that "45 per cent of cops in New York are neurotic murderers" (16). While race relations in New York had commonly been informed by various shades of physical and rhetorical violence, the civil unrest in Harlem, which would act as a harbinger of later riots in Newark, Detroit, Philadelphia, and elsewhere, emphasized the urgency of the city's escalating civil rights crisis.

It was into this tumultuous setting that two racially charged stage productions opened in New York City; both of which, while strikingly dissimilar in their origins, confronted directly the issues of black masculinity, violence, and the sexual components of racism. Both productions would engage in conspicuously parallel explorations of the institutional victimization of black males while effectively embodying the violence that occurred that summer on the streets of Upper Manhattan. Gladys Vaughn's 1964 staging of Shakespeare's *Othello* for the New York Shakespeare Festival in Central Park and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, published and performed for the first time in May of the same year, examine problems of racial identity and blackness with conspicuously analogous approaches.[2] Despite that *Othello* first appeared close to 350 years before Baraka conceived of *Dutchman*, both plays deal, in unflinching manners, with matters of frank and violent sexuality through the lens of racial identity.

Because of the striking similarities in plot between both plays and staging decisions specific to Vaughn's production of the play for Shakespeare in the Park, her *Othello* yields a production largely in accord with principles outlined by Baraka in his 1964 theatrical manifesto, "The Revolutionary Theatre." Despite Baraka's assertion that "The Revolutionary Theatre must teach [white people] their deaths," Vaughn, herself the white daughter of a Mennonite minister, can be seen to have crafted an *Othello* that was distinctly and unmistakably informed by the same turbulent energy of the civil rights movement that spawned Baraka's confrontational essay (211). This is not to suggest that Vaughn was familiar with, or consciously employed, Baraka's revolutionary principles in her directorial decisions. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the racial tensions of contemporaneous Manhattan that gave rise to Baraka's theatrical aesthetic as

described in "The Revolutionary Theatre" and enacted in *Dutchman* were also distinctly perceptible in Vaughn's *Othello*.

According to Baraka's introduction to a subsequent reprint of the essay in *Liberator*, "The Revolutionary Theatre" was "originally commissioned by the *New York Times* in December 1964, but was refused, with the statement that the editors could not understand it" (4). After then being similarly rejected by The Village Voice, the piece was initially published in *Black Dialogue*. Consequently, though the essay was written for a racially mixed audience, it was initially available only in publications directed at the African American community. Regardless of its intended audience, Baraka's strident essay was nothing if not a provocative call for an all out aesthetic and ideological mutiny throughout the existing theatrical establishment. "The Revolutionary Theatre should force change; it should be change," writes Baraka (210). From this opening rhetorical salvo, it becomes clear that the author makes little to no distinction between artistic innovation and the social upheaval of the time. Rather, theatrical and political changes are inexorably intertwined with one another.

As such, in "The Revolutionary Theatre," Baraka calls for a mode of theatre that "must function like an incendiary pencil planted in Curtis Lemay's cap. So that when the final curtain goes down brains are splattered over the seats and the floor" (212). He imagines a theatre that "will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are victims if they are blood brothers" (213). Earlier in the piece, Baraka tags several of his own early plays as models, writing that "Clay, in *Dutchman*, Ray in *The Toilet*, Walker in *The Slave*, are all victims. In the Western sense they could be heroes" (211). Thus victimization is shown as an essential characteristic of

Baraka's protagonists, and the essay suggests that to eschew the explicit portrayal of such racial victimization is to deny a social reality.

Like Baraka's protagonists, Shakespeare's text also conflates the roles of victim and hero. Othello's heroism is remarked upon early in the play by the Duke and his council. As he is once again commissioned into military service by Venetian officials, Othello is said to be both "valiant" (1.3.49) and "brave" (1.3.290). He behaves in a manner indicative of supreme confidence and self-possession. In defending his marriage to Desdemona he is honest, direct, and unapologetic, claiming to the court in no uncertain terms that he "won [Brabanzio's] daughter" (1.3.93). Yet despite his heroism and renowned martial acumen, Othello is, at his core, a victim. While there is considerable debate regarding the motivations and degree of Iago's treachery, it is clear that he is a prime architect of Othello's psychological breakdown.[3] To be sure, while Shakespeare would go on to explore the theme of irrational and unfounded sexual jealousy and rage with Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, Othello's downfall is instigated by his deliberate manipulation and victimization at the hands of another. This is not to absolve Othello from moral culpability – his rapid, frenzied descent into a perpetrator of domestic violence never fails to horrify – merely to emphasize that, unlike Leontes, Othello's internal fire was actively stoked by Iago's duplicity. In light of his recurrent references to Othello's status as an outsider, Iago can be seen as the embodiment of his culture's internalized racism. Notice the way in which Iago, when speaking to others about Othello, refers to him generally as "the Moor" and thus defines him in almost exclusively racial terms. For Iago, Othello is not seen in his role as a general, a Venetian, or even a man, but as, above all, an "other." While Iago certainly had personal motives for the manipulation and deceit of Othello, one gets the sense that Othello's race made Iago all the more

incensed by his decision to promote Cassio. In this way, the play serves as the classic Early Modern English portrayal of a black man's victimization at the hands of a white hegemony. [4]

On July 9, 1964, just ten days before the Harlem riots, Gladys Vaughn's *Othello* made its debut. Vaughn's production of the play in particular, when examined in the turbulent context of the civil rights movement in Harlem, encourages a racially conscious reading. Vaughn's production, produced by Joseph Papp and staring James Earl Jones as Othello and Mitchell Ryan as Iago, was met with mixed reviews, ranging from claims that this *Othello* "would be a credit to the most illustrious companies" (Taubman 29), to assertions that the production was "the New York Shakespeare Festival's…second failure" (Newsweek 49). What most critics *did* agree on was that Jones's portrayal of Othello emphasized the character's vulnerability. Early in the play, before his crack up, Jones accentuated the character's naivety by portraying him as earnest and cheery. Much is made of the character's seeming innocence and propensity for smiles: "The guilelessness and gentleness of the strong man of action— are there, but…he laughs and grins too much" (Oliver 95). Another reviewer noted that, "It is easy to understand, in his smiling, guileless adoration, how complete is his contentment and how vulnerable it can become" (Taubman 29). In a less kind appraisal, Jones is said to have, "smiled vacuously throughout the first part, presumably in order to emphasize his anguished frowns in the second" (Danziger 421).

There can be seen a general consensus that Jones' portrayal of Othello, especially before Iago's manipulations, possessed an innocence that sets this production apart from many previous and contemporary interpretations of the play. Indeed, when compared to another prominent production from the same year, that of John Dexter's staging which took place at the Old Vic Theatre in London and premiered in May of 1964, it becomes apparent that Vaughn's was a

distinct conception of the character, rooted firmly in the milieu of upper Manhattan in the heart of the civil rights movement. As Ronald Bryden describes Dexter's Othello, portrayed by Laurence Olivier, it becomes apparent that his realization of the character is the antithesis of that portrayed in Vaughn's production. Olivier is described as, "laughing softly with a private delight…dark, thick-lipped, open [and] laughing" (270). While both productions emphasize the character's apparent mirth, Olivier's portrayal of Othello, as described by critics, is characterized by confident glee as if the he is enraptured by his own potent sexuality; the New York Othello, on the other hand, seems to smile in order to emphasize his relative innocence regarding Venetian society's fundamental racism.

The differences in Othello's characterization between the contemporaneous productions of the play are no more apparent than in 1.3, as Othello explains to the senate how he succeeded in wooing Desdemona. Olivier is said to have "described [her] encouragement smiling down on them, easy with sexual confidence" (271). While much attention was given to the grins and facial expressions of the protagonist in both the London and New York productions, critics see power and confidence in Olivier's portrayal while they see naivety in Jones's. Consequently, the production for Shakespeare in the Park can be seen to have inscribed a heightened sense of Othello as a persecuted other in contrast to the Old Vic's "Sauntering" Othello, with his "feet splayed apart [and] hip[s] lounging outward" (270).

Significantly, Jones recalls that the civil rights implications of *Othello* were not lost on those involved with Vaughn's 1964 production. "I remember hearing producer Joe Papp say that Othello should be tough and militant. He never said *angry*, but that was the popular concept of the militant black male in the sixties," writes Jones (158). Papp then, was in favor of an Othello

specifically tailored to reflect the societal anger that would manifest on the streets of Harlem just days later. Jones continues: "Joe wanted me to play Othello tough, to meet hostility with hostility. The phrase 'black rage' studded so many dialogues then . . . it was a popular concept – black rage and anger. You certainly heard it political rhetoric then" (158).

Still, despite Papp's prescriptions for an Othello that would capitalize on crude stereotypes of an emerging group of young black activists, Vaughn advocated a wholly different approach to the character. "Our director" writes Jones, "fought very hard to keep me from imbuing Othello with contemporary hostility . . . . She kept fighting for me not to hit 'whitey' hard, but to overwhelm him with gentle speech" (158). Reflecting on the production in a 1999 interview, Jones recalls the director conceived of Othello, "not [as] a Western black man. . . . She envisioned him as the cultured, gentle, graceful leader that historically he would have been" (*The Actor's Art* 149). Thus Vaughn's direction sought to avoid any crass oversimplifications that might have reduced Othello to a mere caricature – to an embodiment of contemporaneous perceptions of black anger rather than the fully-realized, intensely complex character that Shakespeare created. Instead, Vaughn's production celebrates Othello's intricacy. By championing a protagonist that had "no need . . . to be defensive or physically threatening," Vaughn's conception of Othello is the antithesis of that advocated by Papp (Jones 159). "I found Joe's argument tempting in those volatile days of the sixties," remembers Jones. "It would have exited the contemporary audience of blacks and liberals strutting his stuff up against 'whitey.'. . . but I decided to try Gladys's interpretation" (158).

Nevertheless, by playing up Othello's quiet dignity for the first several acts, Jones would effectively underscore the degree to which his Othello was perceived by audiences as an

unambiguous victim by the play's tragic conclusion. Significantly, the unambiguous, unflinching portrayal of the victimization of black men is the essential component of what Baraka would hail as Revolutionary Theatre. From his essay, it is clear that Baraka's vision of a fully realized theatre of racial confrontation hinges upon the direct depiction of the protagonist as victim. Indeed, like *Othello*, Baraka's dramatic works of the time also succeed in the portrayal of the direct persecution of his black characters. *Dutchman*, Baraka's one-act play which premiered at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City on March 24, 1964, just a few months before the Harlem riots, can be seen as an intensive study of black, male victimization in which, by the end of the play, the protagonist, Clay, has been murdered on a New York subway car by Lula, a white woman. The violence of the play's climax harkens directly back to that of *Othello*. James R. Andreas observes this, noting that "*Dutchman* may well represent the ultimate African American revision of *Othello*" (50). For Andreas, *Dutchman* effectively updates the seventeenth century play "to reflect more accurately the relationship between the races that has existed throughout Western history" (50). In doing so, argues Andreas, "Baraka is suggesting that the true victim in the biracial sexual struggle is the black male, and he is the partner that is ritually sacrificed" (50).

The onstage killing appears all the more unpalatable because it was committed with both tacit and active support of the other white riders on the train. Initially, the passengers seem to ignore the altercation between the characters. They are portrayed as stereotypical New Yorkers: hard-edged city dwellers too caught up in their own affairs and desensitized to the seemingly unpalatable actions of others as long as they remain unaffected. Their *laissez faire* attitudes, however, turn out to be an illusion. Immediately following Lula's brutal stabbing of Clay, as he

lies dead and slumped across her knees, she commands the other riders to "[g]et this man off of me . . . .Open the door and throw his body out" (*Dutchman* 36). Naturally, they obey. In this way, Clay is quite literally a victim of a white conspiracy not only to actively oppress, but to systematically murder young black males. It is vital to one's understanding of the play to note that after Clay's murder, Lula "takes out her notebook, and makes a quick scribbling note" (37). Thus the play seems to insinuate that she is casually adding another to her tally of dead black men. As another young black man enters the train and begins a conversation with the murderous Lula, *Dutchman* leaves the audience with the dread implication that the cycle will repeat. As Anna Maria Chupta observes, Lula is "[a] metaphor for America and for death . . . . She will continue to roam the subways because the historical mechanism is there to justify her victimization of black men" (30). Thus Lula, like Iago, acts as the catalyst for violence and, in doing so, becomes the embodiment of her society's anxieties and hostilities regarding the racial other. Interestingly, Baraka adds a further layer of complexity to his play by positioning Lula as both a white sexual temptress and Clay's manipulative antagonist. "In *Dutchman*," writes Jacquelyn Y. McLendon, "Lula is the white liberal pawn of white American patriarchy whose job it is to seduce the, naïve, young, black, middle-class Clay . . . . In the simultaneity of her actions, she plays out the role of both Desdemona and Iago" (123).

Like *Dutchman*, Vaughn's *Othello* also ends with the death of the black male protagonist. Unlike Baraka's play, in which Clay is murdered as a result of his sexually charged relationship with a white woman, *Othello* ends with the death of the black protagonist by his own hands. Nevertheless, the death occurs as a direct result of Othello's sexual relationship with Desdemona, a white woman. The play makes it clear that their interracial relationship is an unacceptable

disruption to Venetian society. When told by Iago that "your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs," Barabanzio is unwilling to believe that Desdemona would become sexually involved with Othello (1.1.118-119). It is significant that Iago initially reveals Othello and Desdemona's marriage to her father in unambiguously sexual terms. Iago explicitly plays upon Brabanzio's prejudices and fears of miscegenation by warning "you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse, you'll have your nephews neigh to you" (1.1.112-115). Rather than telling Desdemona's father of the couple's marriage directly, Iago knows that using explicitly sexual imagery and specifically invoking Brabanzio's potential biracial decedents would be particularly effective at inciting his anger at Othello.

Further, while comparable in their respective violent conclusions, what separates the climaxes of both works is the degree of agency given to the plays' protagonists. While Clay is a victim in the truest and most literal sense of the word, Othello is victimized more subtly as a result of Iago's mental manipulations. Nevertheless, it can be seen from Othello's self-possessed demeanor, not to mention the relatively high esteem in which he is held in at the beginning of the play, that his jealous rage was directly incited by Iago's machinations. While Shakespeare allows for slightly more ambiguity than Baraka regarding the degree of their respective protagonist's persecution, Othello is unmistakably a victim in some sense. Baraka, given the knowledge of an extra 350 years of historical black oppression, is able, perhaps compelled, to offer a less ambiguous victim. In the heat of the violence of the civil rights era, Clay doesn't need to be tricked into killing himself. He is simply and directly dispatched by the hegemony of 1960s New York.

Whether or not Baraka had *Othello* in mind as he wrote *Dutchman* can be debated. Nevertheless, it is easy to see *Dutchman* as a modern retelling of Shakespeare's classic tragedy. To be sure, Baraka's *The Slave,* published in the same volume as *Dutchman*, invokes Othello directly. The play's protagonist, Walker, a forty year old black man in the process of leading a violent revolution across the city, asks his white ex-wife Grace's new white husband if he remembers "when I used to play a second-rate Othello…I was Othello, Grace there was Desdemona…and you were Iago" (57). Thus Baraka uses Shakespeare's model of an interracial love triangle to establish a literary precedent for his character's tensions.[5]

Still, it is Baraka's *Dutchman* that more closely mirrors Shakespeare. Despite the author's denial of the symbolic implications of his play, with his insistence that, "it is…stupid to think of the Negro boy (in *Dutchman)* as all Negros, even though…most white people do think of black men simply as Negros, and not as individual men…the play is about one white girl and one Negro boy" (187), it is obvious that Baraka is doing more than merely telling a story about two individuals. As Phillip Roth argued in his review of the production in the May 28, 1964 edition of *The New York Review of Books*, "I believe this play is written [for a white audience] —not so that they should be moved to pity or to fear, but to humiliation and self-hatred. For that purpose, nothing but a black innocent and a white devil will do" (13). What is implicit to Roth's assertion is that, for the audience to be moved to introspection and guilt, it is necessary for them to see both Lula and Clay as emblematic of white and black culture respectively. Indeed, Baraka undermines his own argument against the symbolism in his play, stating that the Revolutionary Theatre "is a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dim-witted fatbellied white guys who somehow believe that the rest of the world is there for them to slobber on" ("Theatre" 212). By

championing the political implications of his Revolutionary Theatre, he effectively negates his prior assertion that his play is only about one man and one woman, and not intended to be viewed symbolically.

Regardless of Baraka or Shakespeare's intentions, the concurrent symbolism of *Dutchman* and *Othello* is often hard to ignore. Both plays encourage the viewer to see their protagonists as emblematic of the racial other. *Othello*, while one of many seventeenth-century plays to treat the issue of race through the portrayal of so-called blackamoors, has transcended its position as mere drama, particularly in the United States. Instead, the play often functions as a cultural touchstone – a field for directors, actors, and audiences to explore and negotiate the complexities of contemporaneous race relations in America.[6] Michael Neill makes this point, noting that *Othello* "has rightly come to be identified as a foundational text of modern European racial consciousness – a play that trades in constructions of human difference at once misleadingly like and confusingly unlike those twentieth-century notions to which they are nevertheless ancestral" (qtd in Daileader 2). To be sure, this difference is clearly delineated in the full title of the play, identifying Othello explicitly as "the Moor of Venice." While it is apparent that most of the characters in the play *accept* Othello, likely because of his established military prowess –his utility – it is obvious that he will never gain full and equal entrance into Venetian society. Othello's intrinsic otherness is particularly psychically damaging in light of his apparent bravery and indispensability as a "valiant" general (1.3.50). While many commend Othello's willingness to risk his life by engaging in military exploits on behalf of the Venetian aristocracy, he remains, at his core, a Moor and an outsider.

What marks the case of Othello as particularly tragic is that he doesn't seem to want to believe that he is barred equal access to the hegemony of early modern Venice. This is no more apparent than in third scene of the first act in which Othello earnestly defends his marriage to Desdemona in front of the Duke and his councilors. This public inquisition relies upon Brabantio's assumption that Othello, because of his otherness, could only obtain the love of the desirable Desdemona by way of "… spells and medicines…" (1.3.62). Because Desdemona was not "…deficient, blind, or lame of sense / Sans witchcraft [she] could not [have married Othello]" (1.3.64-65). Othello is forced into the humiliating position of asserting not only has masculinity, but his humanity, as he is viewed by some as one incapable of successfully wooing a white woman of noble birth without some kind of trickery. The injustice of his situation, particularly in light of his career in the military, seems lost on Othello as he sincerely tells the crowd "How [he] did thrive in this fair lady's love" (1.3.125). In his earnest defense of his actions, he does not seem to question why he should have to defend his private decisions in such a public manner.

Like Othello, Baraka's Clay also seems to be unaware that, as a young black man, he is also marked as other by those around him. In the first act of the play, Lula teases him in reference to his early life and education:

> LULA. I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger.
>
> CLAY. That's right. (Jones 19).

Thus Clay plays the guileless victim as adeptly as Othello, both conforming to Baraka's compulsion for the Revolutionary Theatre to present victims. The tragic climaxes of both plays are in no small part products of the portrayal of their respective protagonists as victims.

Dutchman and Vaughn's *Othello* can both be seen to exemplify an ethos that was particular to the civil rights era. The social climate in New York in 1964 was one of turbulence and social unrest. The same atmosphere that fostered Baraka's confrontational essay seems to have influenced Vaughn's vision of Othello. Baraka response to the racial injustice he perceived on the streets on New York taunted and threatened the theatre establishment, asking "WHITE BUISNESSMEN OF THE WORLD, DO YOU WANT TO SEE PEOPLE REALLY DANCING AND SINGING??? ALL OF YOU GO UP TO HARLEM AND GET YOURSELF KILLED, THERE WILL DANCING AND SINGING, THEN, FOR REAL" (Jones 213). In this way, Baraka forcefully asserts that contemporary theatre had a responsibility to echo and portray the violence of the Harlem riots on the stage.

Vaughn, with significantly less venom, managed to be confrontational in her own right. By emphasizing her Othello's naivety and latter playing up his rage, she avoids Baraka's indictment of contemporary popular theatre, a theatre that "like the popular white man's novel shows tired white lives, and the problems of eating white sugar" (213). Instead her protagonist, after succumbing to Iago's manipulations, exhibits "jealous rages and frothing frenzy [that] have not only size but also emotional credibility" (Taubman 29). By the end of the play, Vaughn's Othello succumbs to "a final broken-hearted surrender to the blackness of a world where [he] cannot see or trust" ("Ordinary" 49). As the dead bodies of both Othello and Desdemona litter the stage at the end of the play, we are reminded of Baraka's insistence that, in the Revolutionary Theater "when the final curtain goes down brains are splattered over the seats and the floor" (212). Vaughn, living in New York in 1964 during the height of the Civil Rights Era, seemed to, on some level, agree.

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Notes

[1] In November of the previous year, Gray led what became known as the Harlem rent strike in order to protest the living conditions within a fifteen- block section of the city, during which, in addition to withholding rent, "scores of residents took rats, alive and dead, to a hearing in Civil Court to dramatize the infestation of rodents in their apartment buildings" ("Jesse Gray").

[2] At the time of *Dutchman*'s premier and initial publication, the play was credited to LeRoi Jones. In 1967, Jones would change his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka.

[3] Fred West's "Iago the Psychopath" offers a synopsis and discussion of several interesting critical interpretations of Iago's personality, motivations, and psychology.

[4] While there exists much debate regarding Othello's intended and perceived racial identity, Sylvan Barnet argues simply and persuasively that "the Elizabethans thought of Moors as black" (274). See also Playthell Benjamin's "Did Shakespeare Intend Othello to be Black? A Mediation on Blacks and the Bard" for a larger discussion of Othello's race. Additionally, see Mythili Kaul's "Background: Black or Tawny? Stage Representations of Othello from 1604 to the Present" for a detailed history of representations of Othello's race in performance.

[5] Interestingly, this was not the first instance of Shakespearian intertextuality within Baraka's work. Farah Jasmine Griffin has noted that, in an essay titled "Dark Lady of the Sonnets," first published in the liner notes to a 1962 Billie Holiday album, Baraka "appropriates the Dark Lady . . . by situating her in a tradition and a social context of black American experience" (314). Baraka would come back to Shakespeare by exploring the racial legacy of *Othello* in his 1996 collection, *Funk Lore*. In the poem, "Othello Jr." Baraka draws parallels between Shakespeare's play and OJ Simpson's 1995 criminal trial for the murder of his ex-wife, Nichole Brown.

[6] Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1592) portrays the affair between Aaron, "a Moor" and Tamora "Queen of the Goths." See Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion; or the Lascivious Queen* (1600), John Webster's *White Devil* (1612), and Thomas Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust* (1619-20) for further early modern dramatic depictions of interracial couples.

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